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PINEAPPLE PEAR TO REVIVE GREAT INDUSTRY IN SOUTHERN GEORGIA

LIBERTY COUNTY CONTRIBUTES TWO GREAT PEARS TO AMERICAN HORTICULTURE, EACH OF ACCIDENTAL LOCAL ORIGIN AND WONDERFUL VALUE.

(By George D. Lowe, in The Savannah Morning News, Aug. 20, 1922.)

BAXLEY, Ga., Aug. 19.—Some time in the winter of 1851, Maj. Jack LeConte bought from a nurseryman in Philadelphia a single specimen of an imported Chinese sand pear which he brought to his farm in Liberty County, Georgia.

Three products of that farm attained world-wide fame, Professors John and Joseph LeConte, founders of the University of California, the foremost physicist and the leading geologist of their time, and the "LeConte" pear. After coming into bearing this pear attracted great attention and thousands of trees propagated from it were set all over South Georgia.

For some years the pear industry of the coastal country and Southwest Georgia was much more important and even more promising than the new peach activity farther up state. However, a destructive blight, that was beyond the skill of horticulturists to fight effectively, attacked the orchards and they soon passed out of existence, but not before they had absolutely proven that South Georgia from the standpoint of soil and climate is admirably adapted to pear growing.

A Curious Coincidence

Fate plays strange tricks with sections as well as with individuals. Joseph LeConte, the Liberty County boy, around whose home no rock larger than a soft field pebble can be found, became professor of geology in the University of California, the leading mineral state, and a famous authority on mineralogy. John LeConte was hardly less famous as a physicist and in the domain of general science. The pear which could not be kept in South Georgia because of blight became California's most profitable horticultural activity. Californians say that for every net dollar the orange has brought into their state the pear has brought three. The pear orchards of the San Joaquin valley are more valuable acre for acre than the orange groves farther south. But for blight this development would have come about in South Georgia, much nearer the centers of population and where the American industry really began. But for the poverty of the State after the war and the lack of funds to support its institutions of higher learning, the brothers LeConte, might have been kept in their native state. South Georgia feels that she has done a great part by California.

Now Comes the Pineapple Pear

In the winter of 1888 Dr. C. C. Daniel, a prominent Liberty County physician, drove up to the gate of the John D. DeLoach plantation some forty miles south of the LeConte place and now in Long county. He handed Mr. DeLoach a pear switch with the remark that he had cut it from the finest pear tree he had ever seen in his life down on the island, advising Mr. DeLoach to set it immediately, which he did. It was placed in a small orchard of blighting LeContes and Keiffers and grew off rapidly as the pear always does in South Georgia. It came into bearing the sixth year from the switch and showed quality and productivity beyond expectation.

Before the performance of the tree attracted much attention Dr. Daniel was dead, and no one now living knows exactly where he got it. In those days Liberty county sportsmen hunted deer on all the islands, St. Catherines, Ossabaw, Blackbeard, Sapelo and St. Simon. On all of them were fine old plantations lying in the desolation that followed the Civil War, abandoned then to negroes, and on any one of them the pear tree may have stood. On the islands the pear does even better than on the mainland, according to old observers of the early LeConte days.

Mrs. Lewis DeLoach Dasher inherited the DeLoach farm and has lived there all her life. She saw this pear come into bearing, produce bountiful crops yearly and remain unblighted among dying LeConte and Keiffer trees. After a few years she set out a few more trees and in later times propagated the pear in a small way, giving them to friends for the most part. The farm is isolated and no main-traveled road passes even nearby. Knowledge of the pear was confined to neighbors for years and everybody expected it to blight sooner or later. Last year, its thirty-third from the switch, the tree bore sixty-six bushels of fruit, and an eight-year-old descendant yielded eighteen measured bushels. Thousands of bushels of these fine pears were fed to hogs during many years, but two years ago a cannery operator heard of them and has bought the crop since. Lately he also bought the farm which lies forty-two miles from Baxley and seventeen miles from the nearest shipping station over a deep, sandy road.

Proving the Blight Immunity

Ten years ago cuttings were sent to the Georgia Experiment Station for comparison with blighting varieties. When the young trees became established the horticulturists set to work to prove or disprove the claim to immunity from blight. Pure laboratory cultures of pear blight were inoculated into them; blighting wood from other varieties was grafted and budded into them as they stood in a blighting block of LeContes and Keiffers. They came through unscathed. Horticulturists are chary about making unqualified statements, so the Georgia station does not say that the Pineapple pear is blight-proof, but goes on record to the effect that they have not been able to blight it either naturally or artificially, and that for orchard purposes on any scale it may be regarded as immune to blight. When the Pineapple pear finally got into the horticultural spotlight efforts were made to determine its exact origin. Much time had elapsed and some inferences must be used in the process, but it appears evident that the original Pineapple pear was given to a planter in South Carolina by a relative who was an officer in Commodore Perry's fleet which visited China and Japan in the middle fifties, and who brought the rooted pear from China when he returned. That tree now stands still vigorous and in bearing, nine feet in circumference just above the ground and with a tremendous spread of limbs. In its prime several yields of over one hun-

dred bushels were harvested and last year it bore some forty bushels. Undoubtedly the tree on the Georgia offshore island came from a cutting sent by some South Carolina relative of the owner. The South Carolina specimen stands alone in its generation outside of China, so far as close inquiry yet discloses.

A Canning Pear Primarily

The Pineapple pear, so-called because when ripe it has a distinct pineappleish odor, is essentially a canning proposition or for preserves, jams and marmalades. It is not regarded as an eating pear of high quality although superior to the sand pears, as it lacks the gritty lumps shown by them and has a smoother flesh. It is medium in size as grown by Mrs. Dasher, where no thinning is ever done, but when properly handled would average up well. Cannery pronounce it better for their purpose than any other known to them, and they have lately visited the Dasher orchard from as far away as Indiana. Two small annual packs by a Waycross cannery have set the whole trade afire with interest in the Pineapple pear.

Many South Georgia farmers have driven over to the Dasher orchard lately to inspect the crop on the trees, several parties passing through Baxley last week. They know that their land is better adapted to pears than to any other fruit and that a greater tonnage of pears can be produced on an acre than of any other crop, agricultural or horticultural, and only blight has kept them out of pear growing up to now.

The pear prefers the lighter lands and the lower altitudes. It is distinctly a South Georgia proposition, its preferred range lying between salt water and the Savannah-American-Montgomery line of the Seaboard. Above that line its early blooming habit may make bearing erratic, while Mrs. Dasher says that the old tree on her place has never missed a crop since coming into bearing.

Large Planting This Year

It is reported that the available supply of nursery stock of the Pineapple pear has all been secured for 1922 planting which will give an acreage of about two thousand. The supply is likely to be ample after this year. Several authorities have said that within ten years the Pineapple pear industry will bring more money into Georgia than the peach crop now yields and a few years thereafter will at least double it. It is to be noted that the new pear is so long-lived and so vigorous in growth that the ordinary 25x25 planting is too close. Horticulturists who have seen the Dasher orchard say a 40x40 setting is as close as can be used safely. This is 27 to the acre.

A few pears of this variety on the St. Louis market early this season, carefully graded and packed netted the shipper \$1.80 the bushel. A cannery however, paid 70c for the run-of-orchard stock from wagons at the car door and handled them in bulk like sweet potatoes. From a single group of small orchards around a little town that got in the game early, this cannery bought fifty carloads.

Pineapple pears, Lucetia dewberries and Okwola blueberries, all sandy land fruit crops newly introduced into South Georgia and all promising wonderful returns to the grower who gets into the game early, will soon make this section the center of a shipping and canning industry that will rival California in importance. The whole territory lies near water transportation to the centers of population in the East, thousands of miles nearer than the famous California fruit districts.

